# LABOUR MONTHLY

A Magazine of Labour Unity
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Editor: R. Palme Dutt

**The Great Debate** ★ R.P.D.

**We Choose Friendship** ★ Judith Todd

**The General Strike, 1926** ★ R. Page Arnot

**After the Communist Congress** ★ John Gollan

**One of the Mammoths** ★ J. Carter

**Historical Materialism and the Ancient World** ★ Joseph Needham, F.R.S.

**May, 1956**

**One shilling and sixpence**

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# TOUCHSTONE

ON the eve of May Day, there is a note of optimism in letters we receive from all parts of the world. An Australian rejoices in the achievements of the world peace movement: 'Never anything like it in the history of the world before. For peace is the touchstone, and history will one day pass its verdict on who it is who best serve the interests of world peace and human happiness.' In this spirit, May Day greetings to all our readers, everywhere. We will try to do better yet for peace, international friendship and socialism.

There was remarkable interest in *British Labour and the Soviet Union,* by the Labour Party veteran, Fred Henderson, in the April LABOUR MONTHLY. Typical was a reader who asked for two more copies the moment he had read it: 'For sound logic and reasoning it is a masterly analysis of the position British Labour should take up toward the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union.' A Londoner told me: 'That article and R.P.D.'s *The Vision Splendid* alone make it a first class number. If only every progressive and Left winger could have read it, we'd have this credit-squeezing, arms-piling, colony-crushing Government on the run; they wouldn't last six months.' A number of district committee members of the Amalgamated Engineering Union ordered copies, for the article on *Engineering* by J. R. Scott, whilst trade unionists from all industries praised Harry Pollitt's tribute to *Tom Mann.* That number was a real blow for unity and against those who would hamper it.

One thing is clear. Our readers overseas, as well as in Britain, regard L.M. indeed as *A Magazine of Labour Unity,* as a unifying and inspiring force. They put it in different ways. From *Lancashire:* "Just read L.M. and it's like a breath of fresh air!' A *Scottish railwayman;* 'Send a copy to these two fellow members of the Labour Party here. I'm still passing my copy around at work. It's especially good for the young people.' *Welsh Labour councillor:* 'Such a wide range of articles, plenty of variety and so useful.' *New Zealand gardener;* 'Heartfelt thankfulness for all L.M. has been to me in this small faraway country.' *American journalist:* 'Grand publication, doing a magnificent job.' *Oxford Don:* 'Wishing you a continued career of splendid usefulness.' From *Kent:* 'Such continued excellence! After 18 years I still find it an inspiration and await it eagerly each month.' From *Cumberland:* 'I send mine to a parson friend, and he passes it on too.' It's the same story; from the *Canadian,* whose 'only complaint is that it doesn't come often enough,' to the *Scottish Labour county councillor,* whose copy arrived in the nick of time to provide just the economic arguments needed for him to defeat a reactionary proposal.

What is the secret of this unifying force, nationally and internationally? These are some of the main factors,

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## Notes of the Month

# *The Great Debate*

**'Everyone recognises that change is in the air, and that the old Western policy is obsolescent, if not obsolete.'**

**JOSEPH HARSCH, Christian Science Monitor, 10.1.56.**

**'The need in this new and changed situation of discarding the old ways and trying new ideas and a fresh approach to peace.'**

**ALFRED ROBENS, House of Commons, 27.2.56.**

ON this May Day of new hope and promise for the world—despite all the problems and dangers still with us—a fresh current is stirring and is changing all the old landmarks. The old problems still clamour for solution; the inheritance of the cold war still dogs our steps. But on all sides there is recognition of a new world situation and a new balance in the world. Among representatives of all political sections, equally in the sphere of international relations, and within the labour movement, a fresh wind is blowing. The search goes forward to chart a new course for the second decade after the war such as will replace the dark clouds and threats of the first decade by happier omens. The Great Debate has opened.



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**Three Themes**

What are the essential themes of the Great Debate? Not about Stalin. That there should be spots on any sun would only startle an inveterate Mithra-worshipper. Not about the now recognised abuses of the security organs in a period of heroic ordeal and achievement of the Soviet Union. To imagine that a great revolution can develop without a million cross-currents, hardships, injustices and excesses would be a delusion fit only for ivory-tower dwellers in fairyland who have still to learn that the thorny path of human advance moves forward, not only through unexampled heroism, but also with accompanying baseness, with tears and blood. The Great Debate that has opened is about larger issues, which spring from the swiftly moving new world situation, and which were spotlighted by the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Three above all. First, the future of mankind in the nuclear age, of East-West relations, of peace and peaceful co-existence. Second, the future of the labour movement to meet the challenge of new conditions. Third, the future of the transition to socialism, for the completion of national and social liberation throughout the world.

**Five Years of Change**

Five years ago in these Notes in August, 1951, we wrote already of the first stage of the Great Debate which had begun with the opening of the cease-fire negotiations in Korea as the initial sign of the turning point in the international situation. But the signs then were still weak and early. It took two years even for the cease-fire to be achieved in Korea. Since then the transformation has moved forward at an accelerating rate. Cease-fire in Korea; cease-fire in Vietnam; the leading independent rôle of India in the cause of peace; the Bandung Conference of states representing the majority of mankind for peaceful co-existence; the Geneva Conference of Heads of State; the upsurge of the Middle East and victories of independence of Egypt and the Sudan; the soaring economic achievement of the socialist world; and then the Twentieth Congress, with its tremendous new perspectives. Attempted counter-measures in plenty have not been lacking: Nazi rearmament, South-East Asia Pacts and Baghdad Pacts. But these have had to be pushed through in the face of overwhelming popular resistance; they bear already in the sight of all the character of desperate rearguard actions to turn the tide of history. The caravan moves on.



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**Quickening Pace**

Since the Twentieth Congress the pace has quickened. Consider the events of the mere six weeks of March and the first half of April. France, on the basis of the new leftward majority in parliament, moves to open official criticism of the entire Western military policy of the past years, and prepares for the visit of the French Premier to Moscow. The British people, breaking through all the police iron curtain barriers, boisterously welcome Malenkov; and the die-hard campaign to cancel the Bulganin-Khrushchov visit fails. Iceland's parliament calls for the withdrawal of American troops. Morocco and Tunis win independence. Jordan expels Glubb; and the last British troops leave the Canal Zone. Pakistan proclaims a Republic. Ceylon's people clear out the discredited flunkey Kotelawala and align their country with the progressive international orientation represented by Nehru.

**Socialist Aid**

The Indo-Soviet Steel Agreement, finally signed in the beginning of March for the erection of a giant steelworks with Soviet aid, is followed a month later by an Indo-British Steel Agreement for the construction of a similar giant steelworks with British aid. Imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery. A new conception of the relation of advanced industrial countries to under-developed countries whose economy has been kept backward by imperialism is now extending from the socialist sphere to beyond its boundaries. President Eisenhower may still be demanding astronomical figures of dollars from Congress for the old type of so-called 'aid', four-fifths of which is officially described as 'military aid' (pouring in guns and subsidising troops for counter-revolution to uphold reactionary régimes which would otherwise collapse in a day without such aid), while the remaining one-fifth of so-called 'economic' aid is officially defended to Congress as subservient to the political and strategic purposes of United States foreign policy. The old familiar type of export of capital, investment, loans, credits or grants from imperialist countries to colonial or under-developed countries (sometimes mis-described as 'economic aid') may still continue, which is directed, not to make possible the independent economic development of the country in question, but to maintain its dependence, facilitate commercial penetration and pump out its raw material resources, while leaving the people in abject poverty.



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**A New Revolutionary Principle**

But the new revolutionary principle of aid from an advanced industrial country to an under-developed country to enable that country to establish its own independent economy by industrialisation, this new principle, first practised in history within the Soviet Union in the relations with the Central Asian Soviet Republics and other former backward colonies of Tsarism, then extended during the last decade in the relations of the Soviet Union with the People's Democracies of Europe and with the Chinese People's Republic, is now extended beyond the frontiers of the socialist sphere to countries in Asia and the Middle East. More. Under the beneficial stimulus of competitive peaceful co-existence this principle begins to force itself even on the imperialist countries, so that industrialisation—the indipensable basis for independent economic existence and therefore for full and effective independence from imperialism—begins to go forward in these countries, not only with Soviet aid, but, under its stimulus, also with what the Twentieth Congress ironically and not unjustly called 'indirect Soviet aid' from the imperialist countries. This is a very striking concrete measure of a changing world.

**Socialist International and Communism**

Within the Socialist International two successive meetings of the Bureau and of the Executive of the Bureau have taken place to discuss the outcome of the Twentieth Congress and the proposition of co-operation with Communist Parties. True, the immediate outcome is negative; the emphasis in the public statement is placed on the old dogmatic abstractions of alleged irreconcilable opposites, without regard to the immediate common interests for peace and the defence of living standards, which in real life are felt and recognised and acted upon by socialist and communist workers together in all countries. But differentiation already appeared at Zurich between the British Labour Party, French Socialists and Canadians on the one hand, and the Austrian-Dutch-Scandinavian majority on the other, when the Labour Party moved a minority amendment against the majority extreme view; and again at the London meeting when the document prepared by the Labour Party appears to have been ignored by the majority ('Transport House prepared a document, but little use seems to have been made of it', *The Times,* 9.4.56). The issue will not be so easily settled. The very fact of these two meetings of the Bureau means that the discussion has opened; the question is on the agenda. In Italy co-operation exists. In France the whole pressure of the political situation drives towards it. In



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the special conditions of Britain the Twenty-Fourth Congress of the Communist Party has made its fresh approach to the aims of co-operation. On every side new questions are arising.

**From Fear to Hope**

'The trouble is', wrote the correspondent of *Time*, Jim Bell, in April, 'that the Geneva summit meeting killed the fear on which Nato was based.' A penetrating judgment which goes further than its proponent may have realised. For if mankind turns from being driven by fear to being moved by hope, there is no limit to the horizons which now open. Why this change in the mental climate of the world which all can now feel? What underlies this new world situation which is so visibly transforming the whole question of East-West relations, of the relations between the old minority world of capitalism and the rising majority world of socialism and national liberation? Many factors may be indicated. Underlying all is undoubtedly the manifest advancing peaceful economic and constructive strength of the socialist world (from less than one-tenth of world industrial production to nearly one-third today), the advance of socialism from one country to a world system, with the ceaseless peaceful initiatives of the socialist world. Closely allied with this, and arising from the extending weight of socialism in the world and the consequent end of the monopolist domination of the world by imperialism, is the advance of four-fifths of the former colonial and semi-colonial majority of mankind to the establishment of independent states, and to increasing open differentiation from the policies of their former imperialist overlords and to friendly co-operation with the socialist world for peace. All this has manifestly changed, and is further changing, the balance of the world.

**A Revolution of Thought**

The new conceptions which arise from this changed world balance, and which have rendered obsolete all the old assumptions of the Western system of military alliances as the 'bulwark against communism', may be briefly indicated. First, it is now universally recognised that there is no question of military superiority of either camp. From this has followed the collapse of the old Western 'policy of strength' with its dream of the eventual 'showdown' or dictated solutions in place of negotiation. Second, it is now universally recognised that the entire nuclear strategy is suicidal, and that in this sense the 'Great Deterrent' is the Great Illusion. The Defence



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White Paper may still seek to brandish the nuclear weapon as the lynchpin of Western strategy (now also for 'limited wars'); the Government may proclaim the 'plan' to evacuate twelve millions of the population to fictitious 'safe areas'; while the official Labour Party pamphlet in reply may retort that the real solution is not 'evacuation' but 'dispersal'. But the majority of intelligent people have long reached the conclusion that all this is mania, even though still dangerous mania. Third, it is now universally recognised that the Soviet leaders and all the leaders of the socialist world want peace, just as the Soviet leaders have recognised at their Twentieth Congress that there is today no aggressive State in either Europe or Asia which could launch a new world war. The special question of the United States, which now stands at the crossroads of its policy to face the new world situation, and is at the moment in this presidential year torn between conflicting currents, needs separate consideration.

**'This Is All Rather Different'**

Walter Lippmann has graphically described the perplexity of American policy in face of this new world situation which has begun to make its vast panoply of military alliances inherited from the previous decade look obsolete:

> In the past few months Mr. Dulles has found himself entangled in an extraordinary series of dilemmas—in issues in which he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. He has been caught in the Goa dilemma between Portugal and India, in the Jakarta dilemma between the Netherlands and Indonesia, in the North African dilemma between France and the Algerian Arabs, in the Palestine dilemma between Israel and the Arabs, in the Baghdad dilemma between Iraq and Egypt, in the Cyprus dilemma between Britain and Greece, in the Persian Gulf dilemma between Saudi Arabia and Britain, and so on and on.
>
> This is all rather different from what it used to be in the pre-Geneva phase of the cold war. Then the issues were between Communists and anti-Communists. The line of leadership was self-evident. But now the issues which plague Mr. Dulles are very often primarily among our allies and the peoples that we are courting . . .
>
> The old, much simpler days are past when there was one great adversary and leadership consisted in opposing him.
>
> (Walter Lippman, *New York Herald Tribune*, 7.4.56.)

Similarly Mr. Dulles himself reported in Washington on March 23, after returning from his tour of ten countries in the Middle East



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and Southern Asia, and discovering the marked contrast of the frigid reception he received from the enthusiastic mass reception to the Soviet leaders:

> While we think first of the dangers that stem from international Communism, many of them think first of possible encroachments from the West.

Herein is expressed the present dilemma of American policy, reflected equally in the present doldrums of Nato, from which General Gruenther, after three years of vainly belabouring and berating his European 'allies' and seeing his 'grand army' dwindle under him, has thought it wisest to retire. In the United States also there is going to be need for thought, even though the atmosphere of a presidential election may temporarily arrest its public progress.

**Britain, France, and Germany**

What of Britain? France has led the way among the Western powers in taking the first initiative to begin to break free from old conceptions and respond to the new world situation. The bold declaration of Foreign Minister Pineau on March 2, criticising the 'gigantic error' of Western policy over the past few years, has been followed up by the no less emphatic declaration of Premier Mollet on April 2 when he said, with reference to the disarmament negotiations:

> Each time No is said by the United States, we lose a battle in world opinion. People conclude: 'Well, then, it is Russia that wants peace. It is the United States that doesn't want it'.

He went on to emphasise that German unity could only be realised in a framework of general disarmament, in place of the other way round—precisely the thesis maintained by the Soviet Union at the Geneva October meeting of Foreign Ministers and then rejected by the Western representatives. France has moved ahead of Britain. But there is reason to believe that Britain, simultaneously involved in many difficulties with the United States, has found the initiative of France not unwelcome:

> The rogue elephant tactics of M. Pineau have compelled France's allies to look afresh into the whole question of relations with the Communist half of the world. While France is moving a bit too fast for Britain, and much too fast for the United States, she is moving in a direction that begins to look inevitable. (*Sunday Times*, 25.3.56)

Shades of the inevitability of gradualism! When a leading Conservative organ begins to speak in these terms, the signs of new currents are inescapable.



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**Britain's Policy Straddle**

British policy, hamstrung by the preoccupations of its obstinate losing battle to maintain its old monopolist hold in the Middle East against both Arab and Cypriot national liberation and American penetration, has not been ready so far to move with the same freedom of action as France in the European sphere. French preoccupation with the war against Algerian national liberation actually sharpens the hostility to Nato, which in the eyes of French colonialists has diverted French armed forces from their colonial tasks to an inappropriate military training, equipment and immobilisation under American command against an imaginary Soviet menace. Hence the most varied streams in French policy drive to the new orientation. British official policy, on the other hand, remains torn between the past and the future. On the one hand, the British Ambassador in Paris, Sir Gladwyn Jebb, sang the old gramophone record of the inevitable conflict with world communism in order to rebuke France on March 6:

> By definition Communism must pursue its efforts to destroy capitalism. Conflict is the natural state of relations between East and West.

Similarly the *New York Times* correspondent in London, Drew Middleton, reported on March 22 a 'senior official' in London as declaring:

> Almost without noticing it we have passed from the post-war into the pre-war era. We know it. I hope you know it in Washington.

On the other hand, the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Roger Makins, emphasised the significance of Soviet economic aid as 'without strings or conditions' and went on to criticise the Western cold war strategy in terms closely similar to those of Mollet and Pineau:

> On our side there is a tendency to stress guns rather than butter.

In short, from the British point of view, both France and the United States are out of step.

**Sir Anthony's Two Voices**

As befits a British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden sings both tunes on successive occasions in order to keep his disparate flock in hand. On the one hand, he seeks to appease his anti-Soviet diehards by proclaiming in public speeches at Conservative rallies all the old provocative shibboleths of the cold war, as in his speech at Bradford on January 28:



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> The character of the contest between the Communist Powers and the Western Democracies has changed, not for the better . . . The address of the Power which dragoons and dominates its satellites is 'The Kremlin, Moscow'.

And similar stuff to delight the High Tory gallery and charm away their suspicions. On the other hand, his actions are in certain respects more important than his words. Having removed the extreme anti-Soviet Macmillan from the Foreign Secretaryship after the latter's dismal servility to Dulles and consequent fiasco at Geneva in the autumn, he has firmly resisted the very considerable clamour of the anti-Soviet Tory sections (reflected in the normally loyal Conservative organ, the *Daily Telegraph*) to cancel the Bulganin-Khrushchov visit. Indeed, he went so far as to achieve a (for him) relatively infrequent epigrammatic brilliance when he tartly replied to Air Commodore Harvey's enquiry on the 'cost' of the visit:

> Very much less than a millionth part of one hydrogen bomb.

The significance of the differentiation in Conservative ranks should not be under-estimated.

**What Is a 'Great Power'?**

Sir Anthony Eden's dilemma of policy, reflecting the contradictions of the present position of British imperialism, found expression in his speech to the Central Council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations on March 16, when he sought to defend the 'unpopular' economic measures which the Government felt compelled to impose by the argument:

> Only a solvent and prosperous Britain can shoulder the burdens of a Great Power. History and geography have combined to give us a special position in the world. We cannot, and will not, abdicate from this. . . .
>
> The logical conclusion of abdication would be a policy of neutralism, and to be neutral for Britain is a slow death.

But supposing the 'logical conclusion' of this imperialist conception of a 'Great Power', with the consequent crippling colonial wars and overseas commitments, making Britain the most heavily taxed and militarised major country in the world in proportion to population, leads to economic strangulation and a consequent alternative form of 'slow death'. What then? No wonder that one Conservative M.P. has already jumped to the opposite conclusion:

> Mr. Osborne (Louth, Conservative) said that we were trying too much to keep up with the Russians and the Americans. We did not have the resources to keep up with the Joneses and the Browns. Was it not time to recognise that Britain had come down in the world, and was no longer the Great Power she had been. (*The Times*, 1.3.56)



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Between these two extremes of Conservative utterance is typically expressed the present crisis of British imperialism.

### How Britain Can Lead

But is it really true that these are the only two alternatives before Britain? Either to perish of economic strangulation in the desperate attempt to maintain a doomed imperialist system of power. Or to give up the unequal struggle and sink to the level of an insignificant country with little voice in world affairs. The two alternatives are equally preposterous. Never had Britain such an opportunity as today to play a foremost progressive rôle in world affairs, equally beneficial for peace and security in the world, and for the solution of Britain's problems at home. Let us recall the words of *The Times* on June 22, 1942:

> The structure of European peace must be truly international, and must be founded on the freedom and co-operation of the peoples of Europe. But Great Britain and Russia will remain the essential pillars on which the whole framework rests. So long as they are intact and erect, the structure of peace will stand unshaken. If they fall assunder, nothing else will avail.

It is precisely because Britain during the decade after the war, in the desperate attempt to maintain a doomed empire, and falling a victim to the Hitlerite anti-communist bogey, fell away from this policy, entered into unhealthy dependence on the United States, and agreed to the partition of Europe and the remilitarisation of the old forces of Nazism in Western Germany, that Britain has fallen deeper in the mire. Britain, France and the Soviet Union, as the leading powers of Europe, have the responsibility to co-operate for peace and security in Europe; and on this basis the peaceful reunification of Germany can be achieved. More. Britain has the decisive opportunity for world leadership for peace today. An independent and consistent initiative of Britain for peace today alongside France, the Soviet Union, India and China, for collective security in Europe and Asia, for the ending of colonial wars, for the peaceful reunification of Germany outside sectional military alliances, and for disarmament, would rally all Europe and Asia in support, and hasten the indispensable revision of United States policy.

### National Independence and Working Class Leadership

But such a development requires decisive changes and a positive step forward in the whole orientation of Britain's policy. It requires a change in political direction in Britain. Its fulfilment requires in



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the first place the effective national independence of Britain. When Sir Anthony Eden last went to Washington he pleaded for permission to relax the embargoes on trade with China in order to assist in meeting Britain's desperate market problems. Permission was not granted. Is that what Sir Anthony means by the status of a 'Great Power'? Toryism may manœuvre an election in Britain, not on the basis of confidence in its own merits, but on the basis of the wave of disillusionment with the shortcomings of past Labour leadership and policy. But Toryism cannot lead Britain along the path of peace, progress and economic reorganisation required by the present situation. The responsibility of leadership to win a new future for Britain rests and can only rest with the organised working class, representing the majority of the nation and potentially capable of drawing to its banner the widest sections of the people for a new policy which could give them hope. But the fulfilment of this responsibility requires the policy, the leadership and the unity which can alone make it possible. The problems of policy and leadership can only be solved on the basis of the fullest democracy within the political labour movement, such as is at present hampered by the bans on representation and expression of key sections. The problem of unity of the political labour movement turns on the relations of the Labour Party and the Communist Party. To these problems the Twenty-Fourth Congress of the Communist Party directed its main attention.

**Do the Communists Matter?**

At this point the critics commonly explode. How ridiculous! To talk of unity of the political labour movement as turning on the relationship of the Labour Party and the Communist Party. But the Communist Party, they repeat with tireless iteration, is insignificant. As well talk of uniting the fly and the elephant. The Communist Party, proclaims the pontifical *Times* editorial, with its mere 34,000 members and minute electoral vote, is 'derisory' in point of size, and 'of little immediate consequence'. 'The British Communist Party has no political influence in this country whatsoever', thunders the *Daily Herald*. It represents only a 'nuisance value'. It is a 'fifth column', screams the *Daily Herald* a few days later. 'Never in its chequered history', shrieks *Tribune*, 'has the Communist Party been nearer to complete demoralisation'. In fact, quite a remarkable amount of heat appears to be engendered by this insignificant object. A striking unanimity of apoplexy appears to extend from the Carlton Club to *Tribune* at the mention of British Communists



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or the British Communist Party. But why does this apoplexy need to be so constantly buttressed by the ceaseless iteration of the assertion that its occasion is really quite too utterly unimportant for anyone's attention?

**Communist Congress and the Press**

For such a negligible object, a remarkable amount of space and attention was given by the press to the recent Congress of the Communist Party. Of course it is true that the press had conjured up a 'crisis' in the Communist Party and was gleefully awaiting its outbreak. The contrast between the screaming headlines on the day that the Congress met, and the sudden somersault and discomfiture two days later when the press had to creep away with its tail between its legs, deprived of its 'crisis', affords an amusing example of modern high power publicity. Before the Congress the attentive reader learned that 'British Reds Slam their Leaders' (*Daily Express*), 'British Communists Snipe at Their Own Leaders', 'Executive Committee Under Fire' (*Manchester Guardian*), 'Reds Rebel' (*Daily Mail*). After the Congress, when the bewildered press table had had to observe the unanimous adoption of the political resolution by the free vote of the delegates, the gloomy headlines proclaimed 'Communist Crisis? Oh No' (*News Chronicle*), Communist Leadership 'Get Away With It' (*Daily Express*), 'Don't Write Off the Reds Yet' (*Daily Express*). *The Times* ponderously sought to explain the inexplicable by blandly asserting that 'it was evident that the rules enforcing discipline in the party still stand firm' (what 'rules' or what 'discipline' governed the free vote of the delegates was left discreetly unexplained). But this amusing example of current press methods carries also a certain lesson for the politically observant. Would there be so much excitement about an alleged internal 'crisis' of a minute organisation if it were really so politically insignificant?

**Misleading Appearances**

The truth is that the 'insignificant' line of argument can have a certain temporary effectiveness at the moment, but it can be overdone. The Communist Party is still one of the smaller parties, though its membership already represents a greater organised strength than the old socialist parties which founded the Labour Party. The electoral system, designed to maintain the monopoly of two parties, gives to a certain extent a misleading effect; the 'British' system was deliberately imitated in Western Germany in order to



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wipe out all Communist representation in the traditional Marxist strongholds of the Ruhr and the industrial West; its adoption has been openly advocated by reaction in France as a means to reduce the Communist representation of a quarter of the electorate to a fragment. Still the electoral weakness is so far a fact. There is no need to exaggerate the present stage of strength of the Communist Party in order to prove the value of co-operation of Communist and Labour Party workers in order to exert the fullest united strength of the working class and the political labour movement.

**The Industrial Working Class and the Communist Party**

The politically important question for those seriously concerned with the future of the working class movement is not the comparison of the relative size of two parties, but the real situation in the working class. Even the noisiest peddlers of the 'political insignificance' of the Communist Party stress its 'industrial' influence in the factories, in the key industrial areas and in the trade unions—as if this were not 'political'. Hence the foolish talk about 'infiltration', 'trouble-makers', 'fifth columns', etc. But it is precisely this influence that is *political* in its significance and importance for the whole working class movement. When the Communist Party led the campaign in the trade unions against Nazi rearmament, and a real majority was won to reverse the official policy of support, this was a political campaign. When the progressive alliance of Communist and non-Communist trade unionists in the Trades Union Congress win an average of three to three and a half millions for resolutions denounced by the platform as 'Communist-inspired', and with Communist spokesmen as the principal advocates, this is a political phenomenon. When the same or corresponding left policies receive only from one to under two million votes at the Labour Party Conference, despite the addition of the largely leftward votes of the constituency parties, but where Communist spokesmen are excluded, this would clearly indicate that the political influence of Communist spokesmanship and leadership within the labour movement is not negligible. The maintenance of the *Daily Worker* now for over a quarter of a century, as the principal organ of left opinion in the labour movement, entirely on the basis of working class support, when the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress combined, with all their resources, found it impossible to maintain a daily newspaper, is also a political phenomenon of our era which no serious student of working class politics, with any knowledge of the history of the movement, will under-estimate.



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**Realist Conclusions**

Every trade union official, Labour Party organiser and serious political observer is perfectly well aware—whatever fairy tales they may feel compelled to offer on the platform or in syndicated press articles—that there exists a significant body of Communist opinion within the key sections of the industrial working class, and that the Communist Party and *Daily Worker* express and voice this body of opinion. But the industrial working class is the decisive basis of the Labour Party. From this situation three conclusions follow. First, the industrial working class, as in every capitalist country, but above all in such a country as Britain where the wage-earners are the majority of the population, represents the political future in Britain and the leader of the transition to socialism. Second, the Communist Party representing the aim of socialism, already exercises a sizable and growing political influence and leadership within the most active key sections of the industrial working class, especially in major industry. Third, and as the inescapable consequence of the foregoing, it follows that, if the two foregoing propositions are true, then for any serious socialist or Labour Party member concerned for the future of the political working class movement the question of the relationship of the Communist Party and the Labour Party, and of the possibility of co-operation of Communist and Labour workers is no minor subsidiary question, but the key question for the effectiveness and unity and future victory of the political labour movement and socialism in Britain.

**Trade Unions and the Labour Party**

The trade unions are the basis of the Labour Party, thereby differentiating it from the type of social democratic party based on a set of political doctrines. They supply five-sixths of its membership and the main proportion of its central finance. The policies of the majority of unions are thrashed out at conferences with the participation of communists in preparation for the Labour Party Conference. The constitutions of important unions require the participation of their leading officials in delegations to the Labour Party Conference. In given cases the leading officials may be communist. They participate in the discussions of the delegation determining its vote outside the conference hall, and then are illogically excluded from presenting the viewpoint of their membership inside the conference hall. What is the use of talking about the 'menace' of the 'communist embrace'? The 'communist embrace' is already there; only the normal healthy democratic functioning is hindered which



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would facilitate the common thrashing out of policy with democratic representation and decisions to express the wishes of the membership.

**Mr. Gaitskell Kisses Death**

When the Labour Party leadership need more finance for the Labour Party—and they need it badly, as the so far unsuccessful wooing of the co-operative societies for affiliation has indicated, thus revealing that the problem of unity is in fact a problem affecting all sections of the movement—they inevitably have to go to the general secretaries of the trade unions to ask for it. So Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Morgan Phillips travelled up to Southport before the last Trades Union Congress to meet the general secretaries of the unions and ask for more money. But the general secretaries of some of the most important major unions are leading communists. Did Mr. Gaitskell blench before the 'kiss of death'? On the contrary. He positively rushed forward into the embrace with the laudable aim of securing more cash for the Labour Party. All that he forgot for the moment was that there is an old English democratic principle of 'no taxation without representation'. Mr. Gaitskell is a realist. Perhaps he may even yet learn, if communist influence continues to extend in the main trade unions, and he wishes to maintain the indispensable basis of the Labour Party. But Mr. Robens will have to beware of contamination from association with Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Morgan Phillips. For kisses can be infectious. And Mr. Robens' 'kiss of death' was Mr. Gaitskell's 'kiss of life'.

**Liberating Mr. Zilliacus**

Mr. Zilliacus has sought to defend the maintenance of the iron curtain between Communist and Labour Party workers by exhuming the somewhat hoary MacDonaldite fallacies that there exists some supposed irreconcilable antagonism between the Marxist theory of the conquest of political power by a united working class leading the majority of the people for the purpose of establishing socialism and the theories of the Labour Party. True, Mr. Zilliacus has to admit that the Communist Party stands for the achievement of socialism by democratic means. But he endeavours to argue that this is only since the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February, 1956, after which 'the British Communist Party with disciplined unanimity became lightning con-



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verts to democratic socialism'—'a lightning conversion'. It would be an insult to so well documented a scholar as Mr. Zilliacus to suggest that, without needing to go into past controversies, he was unaware that the Communist Party Programme 'The British Road to Socialism' in 1951 propounded this same path. Five years would make a somewhat curious 'overnight conversion'.* Indeed, Mr. Zilliacus could construct a much prettier argument, if he were so inclined, to 'prove' that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union slavishly follows the British Communist Party. But we sympathise with Mr. Zilliacus and would not dream of accusing him of being unaware of the facts belying his allegations. He knows that he is under very sharp surveillance on these matters, and that unless he were to repeat somewhat vociferously the ancient MacDonaldite fallacies he might again be in danger of finding himself on the mat under the somewhat precarious democratic structure of the Labour Party. We sympathise with Mr. Warbey and the rest of the thirteen Labour M.P.s who found themselves caned for endeavouring to hold a conference on suggested democratic improvements of the Labour Party's constitution. We regard Mr. Zilliacus, Mr. Warbey and their friends as good men in bondage. The Communist Party is endeavouring to liberate them and all other socialists in the Labour Party to be free to fulfil the aims of the pioneers.

**A Voice From the Past**

After all, the aims of the pioneers were to try to establish unity of all sections of the working class movement, socialist parties and trade unions together, Marxist and non-Marxist, for the democratically agreed common objectives of the working class. Listen to the Address of the Chairman of the Labour Party Conference in 1917 (when the Labour Party was still a federation of socialist parties and trade unions):

> From the very first the ties which bound the party together were of the loosest possible kind. It has steadily, and in my opinion, wisely, always declined to be bound by any programme, to subscribe to any dogma or to lay down any creed . . . On the contrary, its strength has been its catholicity, its tolerance, its welcoming of all shades of political and even revolutionary thought, provided that its chief object—the unifying of the workers' political power—was not damaged or hindered thereby.

*Since the above was written Mr. Zilliacus has offered the explanation (*Daily Worker*, 17.4.56) that he regarded *The British Road to Socialism* programme of 1951 as a proposal to establish 'a pale imitation of the People's Democracies' which he defines as 'broadly based revolutionary dictatorships which came to power by violent means'. Since *The British Road to Socialism* proposes that a united labour movement, rallying its support from the majority of the people, should elect a parliamentary majority in order to carry through the change to socialism, it is difficult to see how even the scholastic powers of Mr. Zilliacus can 'interpret' this proposal as contrary to the conception of a democratic transition to socialism.



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No doubt conditions have changed. We cannot go back to the past. But is it not desirable to try to find the way to fulfil the same basic aims in the new conditions of today, as the pioneers did in their day? They also had to wrestle with many obstacles in the path of unity. But they found a solution in terms of their day, on the basis of 'catholicity', 'tolerance' and 'welcoming of all shades of political and even revolutionary thought', to combine all sections, without destroying the identity of each, for the common objective of 'unifying the workers' political power'. Has this no message for us today?

**Why Not Try to Co-operate?**

Let us be modest in our first steps towards the aim of unity, recognising that the inheritance of the past will not be overcome in a day. What is in question today is an immediate objective for immediate political needs. It would be idle phantasy to imagine that the present conditions are ripe for settling the ultimate questions of the long-term future relationship of the Labour Party and the Communist Party as we know them today, or the path to the final aim of a united political party of the working class. It would be as out of place to denounce the Labour Party as bankrupt because many of its leaders have moved away from socialism, as to demand the dissolution of the Communist Party because its members sincerely believe that the whole history and experience of the labour movement demonstrates the necessity of an active party of socialism within the broad labour movement of the mass organisations of the working class. What is in question is to seek the first steps to co-operation of all workers, communist and non-communist, in the immediate political field as they co-operate already in the economic field; to remove the artificial barriers which at present hinder such co-operation; and to facilitate the democratic functioning of the political labour movement by the participation of all sections through the democratic election of delegates with equal rights from the mass organisations. These objectives are not unattainable. The whole situation requires them and will further require them. The plain issue is before us. The debate has opened. Even Mr. Robens' 'kiss of death' speech was a contribution to the debate, however negative; for he recognised that the issue now stands before the movement for discussion. Let the debate continue. We can be confident that the good sense of the working class, the urgent needs of the situation and the deep desire for unity will prevail in the end against all the forces of division.

*April 16, 1956.* R.P.D.



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# WE CHOOSE FRIENDSHIP

JUDITH TODD

JUST over four hundred years ago, in 1553, the English explorer, Richard Chancellor, landed in the mouth of the River Dvina and began our long history of trading relations with Russia. Just over a hundred years ago, Britain and Russia fought each other in the Crimean War. Who can doubt which of these events was the happier, and which was, fortunately, the more typical of the relationship between the two countries? Accustomed as we have been during the past few years to hearing the word 'Russian' used as a term of abuse by our more psychopathic press and our more suggestible politicians, it now needs a conscious effort of the historical imagination to recall that Britain and Russia have been allies in the three greatest wars of history (against Napoleon, against Imperial Germany and against the Third Reich), and have also enjoyed long periods of prosperous economic co-operation.

Even for a comparatively recent period of history, when the England of Edward VI and the Russia of Ivan had become Great Britain and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, we have to remind ourselves that 'Bolshevism' was not always or all the time a universal bogey; and that whenever the British Government most truly represented the British people, it was to assert the same standards of international co-operation as the Soviet Government. If one stops to reflect on the coincidence of our national interests, and the complementary nature of our economies, the wonder is, not that we should have been so often in agreement on major matters, but that British governments should have been all too easily diverted from agreement by those whose personal fortunes were bound up with the Tsarist régime, and by anti-British manœuvrers in international politics, professional cloak-and-dagger experts earning their daily bread, and the like.

It is to a British government that we owe the dishonour of leading the foreign intervention in Russia after the October Revolution—'as quietly as possible', pointed out Mr. Balfour, 'so as to avoid the imputation—as far as we can—that we are preparing to make war on the Bolsheviks'. The attempt failed, in spite of this expenditure of tact, and the further expenditure of thousands of lives and millions of pounds. But it was also a British government which was the first to sign, in 1921, a Trade Agreement with the Soviet govern-



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ment, and was the first of the victorious Allied Powers to establish, in 1924, diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R.

From the 1920's to the present day, we can analyse the progress of Anglo-Soviet relations by examining who was working to improve them, and who to exacerbate them, and from this draw conclusions bearing on the present situation. The British labour movement, for example, has, with important exceptions among its leaders in recent years, a proud and fraternal record. The 'Hands Off Russia' Committee came into being in 1919 to stop precisely that policy of imperceptible war quoted above from Mr. Balfour; and the Councils of Action of 1920, prepared to take industrial action if intervention were continued, were summoned by a telegram to every local Labour Party branch from the national secretary of the Labour Party, Arthur Henderson. It was the first Labour government which accorded diplomatic recognition to the U.S.S.R. in 1924, and the second Labour government which renewed it in 1929. Throughout the 1920's Trade Union and Labour Party delegations did much through their reports to make known the facts of conditions in the U.S.S.R. as a counterpoise to the highly coloured distortions of *emigrés,* the press correspondents of the 'Riga lie factory', and the lunatic fringe of Toryism.

A significant commentary on the economic situation of the 1920's and early 1930's is provided by many of the resolutions coming from the Labour movement, calling for increased trade with the U.S.S.R. as a remedy for unemployment. But the Labour movement was not alone in seeing it as a solution to economic difficulties. From Mr. Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, who in 1920 proposed to 'fight anarchy with abundance', to leaders of the business world, many important interests were anxious to restore the pre-revolutionary status of Russia as a major factor in Britain's import and export trade. In the earlier days, as now, it was political obstacles which turned us into a nation of frustrated shopkeepers.

The Revolution was greeted by something less than wholehearted enthusiasm by foreigners who had a stake in the Tsarist régime. The hopes and fears of Tsarist bondholders, concessionaires, and all expropriators who were expropriated, were summed up in a typical open letter to *Izvestiya,* published in the *Morning Post* in 1926, by Sir Henri Deterding, director of Royal Dutch-Shell: his threats that the Soviet government, unless they recognised the Tsarist debts and restored private property (particularly foreign-owned oil plants), would never get credit from abroad, were followed by an



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expression of his 'conviction that Bolshevism in Russia will be over before this year is, and (then) Russia can draw on all the world's credit'. At this moment the late Sir Henri will be agonisingly reading, in some very exclusive hell, of the offer by the Soviet Minister for Foreign Trade to supply Western Europe with industrial equipment on credit.

Just as the export credits needed in the early days were held up for political motives, to the detriment of our economy, so today we are suffering from the 'strategic embargoes' imposed on us by those we have allowed to become our political superiors—who are incidentally also potential trade rivals. Then, as now, their efforts were supported by sensational and often ludicrous press campaigns, but more seriously expressed in a series of dangerous political actions.

A Tory Government broke off diplomatic relations in 1927 after the Arcos raid. A 'National Government' imposed the trade embargo of 1933 after the Metro-Vickers trial. It was under a Labour Government that the policy laid down in Churchill's Fulton speech of 1946 was adopted. No political party which has held office in the last forty years can be absolved from the guilt of obliging those with a vested interest in disrupting Anglo-Soviet relations, whether that interest be the direct one of *emigré* landowners or oil tycoons, or the indirect one of crusaders against Bolshevism like Hitler, John Foster Dulles and other believers in colonial *baaskap*. Under the banner of 'anti-Bolshevism', statesmen of all parties have connived at policies which have indeed brought great hardship upon the 'Bolsheviks', but have also involved their own people in great suffering. The classic example of this is, of course, the chain of events summed up in the word 'Munich', the essence of which was the rejection of collective security as offered by the U.S.S.R., and the plan to work with Hitler against Russia—resulting twenty months later in Britain fighting alone against Hitler and Mussolini.

Yet that it is possible for Britain and the U.S.S.R. to work together has been equally shown under every type of British government during the same forty years. Besides the record of the first two Labour governments, a Conservative government sent Mr. Eden to Moscow in 1935 for talks summed up in a communiqué stating that 'there is at present no conflict of interest between the two Governments on any of the main issues of international policy'. It was the prospect of agreement with the U.S.S.R. for collective security, even under the Chamberlain government, which alone gave hope



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that the menace of Hitlerism could be stopped before war came. It was the war-time National government which signed the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of 1942, and under which the war-time comradeship of the two nations fused, in the minds of ordinary people, into an identity of interest which no one who lived through it will ever forget. The 'balanced' historical studies of the Second World War which are now appearing, the current works of fiction based on emotion recollected in acidity, seem strangely unlike the war we lived through, for in their prudent anxiety to play down the Soviet contribution, they do not reproduce the 'one front' atmosphere which we remember. The victories of El Alamein and Stalingrad, the defence of the Tobruk and Sebastopol fortresses, the accelerated Soviet pressure on the Eastern front to relieve Nazi pressure on the Western front during the attempted German break-through in the spring of 1945—to us at the time these were victories in which we could all take pride because 'our' troops had won them. Kursk and Voronezh came as readily to our lips as Caen and the Chindwin, and we distinguished between the theatres of war on a geographical and not on a national basis.

Throughout this period, the British people have been more consistent than their governments. They have remained singularly untouched by the hysteria of Lord Birkenhead and Jix in the 1920's, Lady Houston and the 'Anti-Soviet Persecution and Slave Labour League' of the 1930's, even (and we say it with all reverence) of Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge today. In spite of a creeping barrage from the big guns of press, pulpit and Parliament: in spite of lies which made the poor old 'Riga correspondents' look like collateral descendants of George Washington; and Dr. Goebbels seem in comparison a small-time con-man: the British people have repulsed these assaults upon their intelligence, and taken every opportunity to respond to Soviet gestures of friendship. Soviet visitors to Britain, from footballers and chess-players to men of the Soviet Fleet and Mr. Georgi Malenkov, have met with a welcome whose warmth is only equalled by that which greets British visitors to the U.S.S.R. Coming from a traditionally reserved people, whose temperature should, according to the laws of thermodynamics, have been reduced to eternal frost by the prolonged cold war, this is a tribute to their instinctive recognition of fundamental values.

The British people are also not given to indulging in mental reservations, which enable them simultaneously to hail in public the U.S.S.R. as the saviour of Europe from Hitlerism, and in private to arrange for Hitlerite forces to be armed against the saviours. They



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are not gifted with the bi-focal vision of an Attlee, who in 1937 could discern 'a State which out of chaos is building a new society . . . on the basis of social justice', and in 1951 perceive 'the inheritors of Russian imperialism . . . men who reject the moral values on which civilisation has been built up'. Today we have to see that these methods of double-think are finally abandoned; we have to see that protestations of a desire for co-operation are strengthened by our own vigilance; and we have to make clear that all those, in all parties and of all opinions, who seriously desire peaceful co-existence are supported by the logic of history.

* * * *

Thirty-nine years of British-Soviet relations have passed since the Revolution of 1917. If one thing stands out more than any other in the history of this period, it is that when the British and Soviet peoples stood together, it was well for them: and that when things went ill in their relations, it was bad for both but particularly ill for Britain. The chance of good relations was there from the beginning. In 1917-18 Lenin made the offer of common front against the German imperial troops, an offer that was refused. Again and again, since then, every time opportunities have presented themselves and been rejected, the consequences have been disastrous for the British people. Such were the offers of Litvinov in 1938 for a common front against Hitler, a front that would have prevented the second world war. And when at last the two peoples were in close relations, waging a common war against the fascist powers, they forged in that terrible struggle amid the wounds and death of millions bonds of friendship that were to endure in the thoughts and feelings of ordinary people both in the U.S.S.R. and in Great Britain. All the subsequent campaigns for poisoning British-Soviet relations, all the attempts of all the cold war experts to engender hatred have not been able to break these fraternal bonds, or the knowledge that the two peoples have a common interest in peace. Another opportunity now presents itself: let us ensure that this time we seize it.

# *Discussion on Labour Unity*

Labour Monthly *readers in the Labour Party, Trade Unions and Co-operative movement are invited to write in short comments or letters on the question of labour unity in relation to the points raised in the current Notes of the Month and the article of John Gollan in the present issue. It is requested that writers give the name of their organisation (not for publication, unless desired).—Ed., L.M.*



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# THE GENERAL STRIKE, 1926

R. PAGE ARNOT

THE General Strike was the greatest event in the last hundred years of the British working class. Today there are many who would be happy to have it forgotten, or treated as an abnormal disturbance of what they would present as a relatively smooth chronicle of social advance, powered by the reciprocating engine of the two-party system. But it cannot be so treated. Nor can it ever be forgotten. Hushing-up of its lessons by hack historians cannot abolish its significance. For the lessons of the General Strike of thirty years ago have still a direct bearing on our problems today.

At midnight on April 30, 1926, over a million miners were locked-out. On Saturday, May 1, the General Strike was declared, to take effect three days later. It was carried in a conference of executives of trade unions by 3,653,527 votes to 49,911. That same First of May there assembled in London the greatest demonstration since May Day began in 1890 with its slogans against war and for the shorter working week. Trade Union banners streamed before the breeze as the marchers went to Hyde Park, ready to take part in the action against lower wages and longer hours that was to be the greatest in three generations. At Monday midnight, May 3, the General Strike began. It was called off at noon on Wednesday, May 12. It lasted nine days.

Arthur Cook, the miners' national secretary, in his pamphlet *The Nine Days* described it in burning words:

'Tuesday, May 4, started with the workers answering the call. What a wonderful response! What loyalty!! What solidarity!!! From John o' Groats to Land's End the workers answered the call to arms to defend us, to defend the brave miner in his fight for a living wage.

'Hurriedly the General Council formed their Committees, made preparations to face this colossal task—the first in the history of this country. No one could over-estimate the greatness of the task that faced the General Council, and to the credit of many of the members—especially Ernest Bevin—they made every effort possible to bring into being machinery to cope with the requirements.

'The difficulties of transport, of communication, of giving information, were enormous; but the foresight and energy of the officials in



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# 1926

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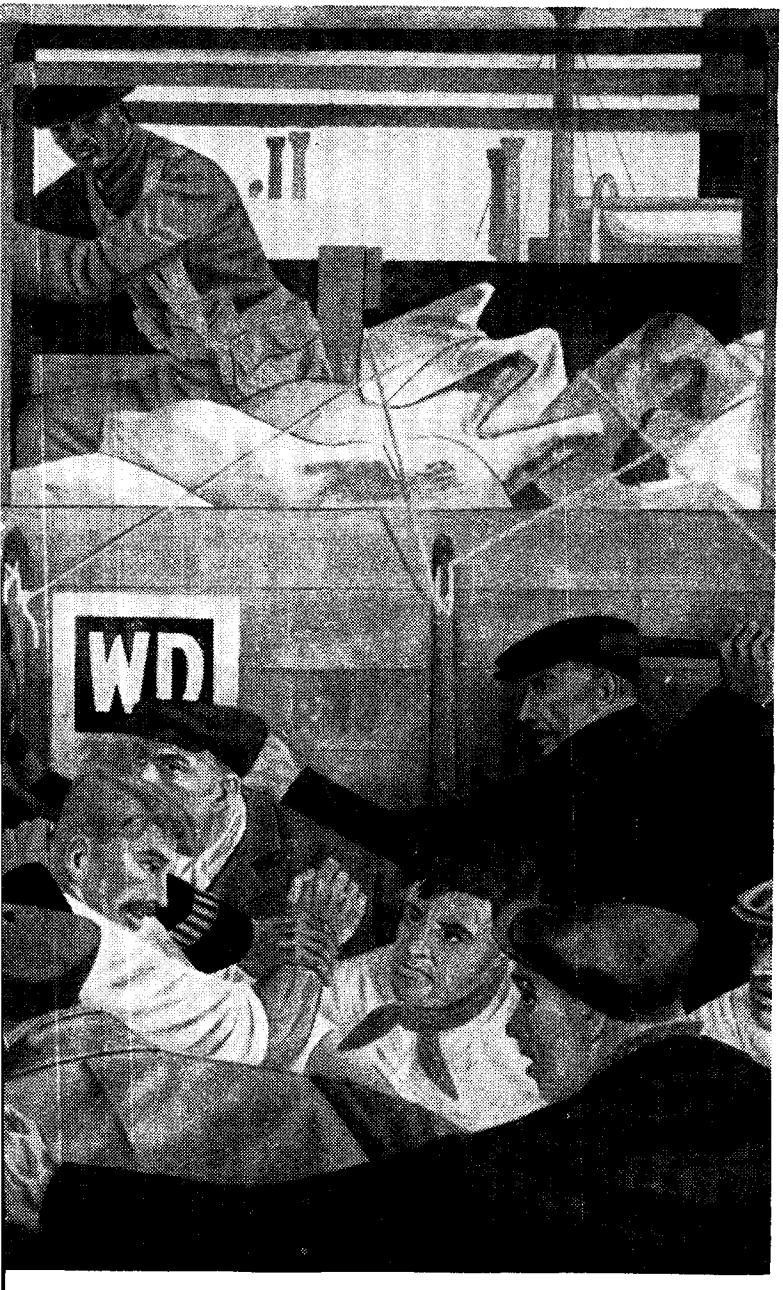


Detail from the mural decoration depicting the General Strike of May 1926, painted by CLIFF ROWE for the Electrical Trades Union.

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the country and of the rank and file rose to the occasion. Links were formed, bulletins were issued; officials, staff and voluntary workers of the T.U.C. and the Labour Party worked night and day to create the machinery necessary to link up the whole movement—machinery that would have been prepared by commonsense leadership months and months before.

'It was a wonderful achievement, a wonderful accomplishment that proved conclusively that the Labour Movement has the men and women that are capable in an emergency of providing the means of carrying on the country. Who can forget the effect of motor conveyances with posters saying "By permission of the T.U.C."? The Government with its O.M.S. were absolutely demoralised. Confidence, calm and order prevailed everywhere, despite the irritation caused by the volunteers, blacklegs, and special constables. The workers acted as one. Splendid discipline! Splendid loyalty!'

Cook wrote these words when the miners were in the second month of their grim seven months lock-out. He did not exaggerate. The communiqué of the Trades Union Congress on the second day of the General Strike is evidence of this.

The idea of a general strike, talked of amongst British workers during the great strikes of separate industries in the four years before 1914, had spread widely when the famous 'triple alliance' of miners, railwaymen and transport workers was formed in 1917, and when its threats of joint strike action had more than once compelled the government to give way—for example, when Churchill as Secretary of State for War appeared bent on sending more troops to Archangel to continue making war on the first workers' republic. But the train of events before the General Strike of May, 1926, began little more than a year earlier, when Churchill as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Baldwin administration put the pound sterling back on the gold standard, thus plunging into a policy of deflation which was bound to lower the standard of living, as well as create unemployment. Or, as Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin said in an unguarded moment: 'the wages of all workers will have to come down'.

Though the miners were the first to be attacked, it was understood throughout the ranks of organised labour that they would not be the last. Therefore when the coal owners announced a lock-out of miners for July 31, 1925, the rest of the movement rallied, the Trades Union Congress General Council appointed a special committee to act along with the transport and railway unions and an embargo was laid on all movements of coal, if the lock-out began.



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Thereupon the Baldwin cabinet which had been backing the coal owners suddenly yielded, and offered a subsidy for nine months to enable existing wages to be paid. They were buying time, time to get ready for 'a showdown'. The lock-out notices were hastily withdrawn. It was Friday, July 31, ever after known as Red Friday.

Red Friday was followed by the high water mark of Trades Union Congresses, at Scarborough in September, 1925, celebrating the victory of working class unity. But on the side of the ruling class there was wild anger at the defeat suffered and intensive preparations to break any renewal of strike action when the subsidy period ran out at the end of nine months. When half the time was up they were ready—as Churchill boasted in menacing tones in the House of Commons on December 10, 1925. But when it came to the point, despite the full preparations on the side of the ruling class and the lack of preparations on the side of the Trades Union Congress, the unity of the working class once more proved unbreakable.

Tuesday, May 4, 1926. It was a different Britain that morning. There were no passenger trains, no coal or heavy goods traffic, no evening papers, no trams or omnibuses. Not only the organised workers in the trades affected, but in most cases the unorganised workers responded also to the call. The slogan popularised by Arthur Cook was taken up everywhere: 'Not a penny off the pay; not a minute on the day'.

On the other side the Government was busy enrolling volunteers through all its agencies to break the strike, while at the same time it began its repressive measures with the arrest of Shapurji Saklatvala, then the solitary Communist who was a Member of Parliament, for a speech delivered on May Day.

Not only had all the members of unions answered the strike call of their Executive Committees but within the unions the most active members were prepared and were active in improvised organisation. They had been put on the alert by the campaign for preparedness carried out by the left wing and in particular by the Minority Movement and the Communist Party. A great conference of the Minority Movement, headed by Tom Mann its chairman and Arthur Horner its acting-secretary* had mobilised the most active and militant spirits in the ranks of the unions. In each locality men like these and women like these were in the forefront of the struggle.

*Harry Pollitt, Secretary of the Minority Movement, together with other leaders of the Communist Party (William Gallacher, Wal Hannington, Albert Inkpin, William Rust) was lying in Wandsworth Jail on a twelve months sentence, inflicted after a state trial for seditious libel, set on foot by the Government to intimidate the workers and prevent their united action.



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Everything possible was attempted by the Government to break the unity of the workers. The British Broadcasting Company in the absence of newspapers was able to disseminate alarmist news or propaganda statements calculated to weaken the unity of the workers. A group of churchmen headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury were not in agreement with the Baldwin-Churchill government: the B.B.C. refused to allow the Archbishop to broadcast. But they gave the fullest prominence to a declaration by Cardinal Bourne that the General Strike was 'a sin against the obedience which we owe to God'. Every other propagandist agency was used. Every Liberal statesman (except Lloyd George) supported the Tory government against the strikers. Always in vain. Catholic or protestant, skilled or unskilled, belonging to or voting for whatever party (Tory, Liberal, Labour, Communist), the strikers stood together, their unity was complete. The two great classes of British society were parted by a gulf that widened every day.

Everybody knew the proverb Unity is Strength. But until the General Strike no one knew the exceedingly great strength of the British working class when united. Many of the workers themselves did not know it, but in these opening days of May, 1926, they began to realise that everything in the country depended finally on them, on their daily toil for meagre enough earnings. They began to realise the class division: and to see the State as the instrument of the ruling class. All the pomp and panoply of war, all the forces of law and order were also seen as instruments of the ruling class. Those who saw warships at the mouth of the Tyne, smaller war vessels brought up the river, to overawe the strikers in Newcastle and the colliery districts will never forget what a revelation this was of the attitude of the ruling class. But neither this nor the widespread arrests, nor the baton charges, nor the savage sentences meted out by ruling class magistrates spread any dismay amongst the workers. On the contrary, it roused a feeling of class hatred that brought greater activity and greater strength. They were up against a government which was stronger than any Tory government had been for well nigh a hundred years because that government was equipped with special powers ready to hand in the Emergency Powers Act of 1920, an Act passed against the protest of the Labour Party and the trade unions, an Act which upon the issue of a Royal proclamation converted Britain into a police state. The Baldwin-Churchill government wielded these powers ruthlessly, but for every one arrested there were ten others to take his place. The strength and organising power of the workers grew from day to day. On the



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ninth day of the strike the B.B.C. 10 a.m. bulletin concluded with the words: 'The position as a whole is still one of deadlock'.

The fatal defect was one of leadership. It is a painful memory today, that ignominious and shameful surrender, that sudden calling-off of the General Strike. It is heartening to remember that when the railway companies and the other employers tried to impose harsh terms the strikers stayed out, refused to go back to work until the terms were modified.

Today the lessons of the General Strike are clear. The unity of the working class, the strength of the working class, if combined with the necessary fighting leadership can end the domination of the Tories and the ruling class generally, and lead the whole people along the road to Socialism.

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## FROM THE *LABOUR MONTHLY* OF 25 YEARS AGO

# THE WORKERS' CHARTER

The First National Convention for the Workers' Charter was held under the auspices of the National Minority Movement at the Bermondsey Town Hall on April 12. There were present 788 delegates . . . More than 60 points were proposed for the Charter, and after close discussion, nine points were launched as follows:

(1) For increased unemployment benefit and abolition of all disqualifying restrictions and task work. Benefit for each unemployed day. Repudiation of the Royal Commission on unemployment.

(2) Against increased insurance contributions. For non-contributory unemployment and National Health Social Insurance. For increased social services.

(3) Against speed-up, dismissals, overtime and the spread-over, and for the seven-hour day. Equal pay for equal work for men, women and youths.

(4) A million houses to be provided by the state, and the reduction of all working class rents.

(5) A guaranteed week and a national minimum wage of £3 per week.

(6) Repudiation of Arbitration. Release of all class-war prisoners. Repeal of the Trades Disputes Act.

(7) Against imperialism and tariff attacks upon workers' standards.

(8) For joint struggle with the colonial workers against imperialist attacks, withdrawal of troops from India and the Colonies, and complete independence of the Colonies.

(9) For the defence of the Soviet Union. Against imperialist war. For full political rights for soldiers and sailors.

From *The Workers' Charter Convention*, by J. A. Mahon, May, 1931.



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# AFTER THE COMMUNIST CONGRESS

JOHN GOLLAN

THE main appeal of the 24th National Congress of the Communist Party was for working class unity to defeat the Tories and to open up the path of socialist advance. As part of this, Congress discussed as a major issue the relationship of the Communist Party and the Labour Party.

Why has the issue of unity come to the fore with such pressing importance just now? For a number of reasons, and above all the political position in Britain. The Tory attacks on rents and social services, their efforts to create unemployment and reduce real wages have undermined the position of the Tory Government. Resistance to the Tory measures has not been confined to the industrial workers, trade unionists and tenants. To carry out its policy, the Tory Government has attacked not only the working class but small business people, professional workers and farmers. The overwhelming majority of the people, including many of those normally voting Tory have come under attack, are bitterly hostile to Tory policy and are being drawn into the struggle against it. As Harry Pollitt put it in his report to the Congress:

> The new feature in the situation is that the political conditions are arising where the Labour movement can rally around it a broadly based popular opposition which can isolate and put an end to the Government and the rule of the monopolists.

No one studying the bye-election results, however, can question that a new approach and effort by the labour movement is needed if this potentially important position is to be transformed into political reality. For the fact is that so far, while the Tories have been losing support, Labour has not been winning increased support. Can there be any doubt that the reason for this is the lack of unity in the movement, an official policy which hardly differs on main essentials from that of the Tories, and the lack of a mass campaign to clear the Tories out?

All this coincides with developments on the international field which underline all the new political possibilities. Guy Mollet, French Socialist Prime Minister, has followed up his Foreign Secretary's criticism of Anglo-American policies with his article in the *U.S. News and World Report*. Mollet stated flatly that he had never believed in the menace of Russian military aggression. He



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attacked the Western Powers for not having placed first emphasis on disarmament at Geneva instead of German unity. In other words, he was questioning the basic public assumptions for Western policy. His speech reflected the prevalent mood of French public opinion and the growing desire which is also increasingly apparent in Britain, for a new effort at negotiations to solve the outstanding issues of international tension.

At the extreme ends of the world, Western policy showed signs of collapse. Iceland's decision to prohibit Nato troops on her territory was followed by the Ceylon General Election which swept away the Kotelawala Government which had been backing the Western policy. Between these two geographical extremes the crisis of Anglo-American policy in the Middle East has become daily more obvious. These, and other events show not only the need and possibility for a new international initiative, but the need too for the unity of Socialist, Communist and progressive forces to supply this new initiative alongside the efforts of the Socialist and non-committed states.

Because of all this the issue of international unity has been coming to the fore in a fresh and urgent way. For the first time for many years the Socialist International has been compelled by force of circumstances to discuss relations with the Communist Party. There can be no doubt that the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has been a decisive factor in this respect. The decisions of the 20th Congress have been grasped by both friend and foe of the Soviet Union. The historic appeal of that Congress for new efforts to restore workmanlike connections between Communist and Social Democratic parties is part and parcel of a supreme bid to facilitate the unity of progressive forces for peace and social advance. It is an approach based firmly on the conception that due to decisive changes in the world balance of political forces war is no longer fatalistically inevitable, peaceful coexistence of different social systems can be ensured and that the possibility for the peaceful advance to Socialism opens up for many countries.

True, the main leaders of the Socialist International have so far rejected the Soviet appeal with the usual hackneyed arguments. But even if so far the results on the surface appear to be negative the great debate on international unity has in fact begun. French, Swedish and other Socialist leaders have had or will have conversations with the Soviet leaders. So also will the Executive of the Labour Party. Events, and the pressure of the movement, are com-



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pelling a discussion on unity. How far these conversations succeed depends on the developing movement for unity.

'The whole situation', said Harry Pollitt, 'makes new urgent demands on both the Labour Party and the Communist Party. A fresh effort is required from both to use their joint power and influence to reach a common understanding which would unite all forces of the labour movement in joint struggle against the capitalists and the Tory Government.' A certain relaxation in international tension had been won, he continued. The necessity for peaceful co-existence between nations with different social systems was daily winning increased support. Conversations had started between leaders of the C.P.S.U. and leaders of European Socialist parties. 'It is unthinkable that the British labour movement should stand aside from all these new and enormously hopeful developments', he concluded. 'The Communist Party solemnly pledges to do everything in its power to assist in a new political understanding being reached with the Labour Party in the light of the new situation at home and abroad which faces us all with new problems and new responsibilities.'

It should be noted that in Pollitt's report and in the Congress resolution it is stated that a new effort is required from *both* the Communist Party and the Labour Party. While maintaining our principled stand to advance what we consider the vital changes in policy needed in the movement and how such a policy ought to be fought for, our Congress criticised sectarian language, habits and methods of work which caused needless difficulties in securing understanding between Labour and Communist workers. We ask all Labour Party members to give careful consideration to this appeal for unity. The widespread dissatisfaction with official policy and the need to unite the various partial struggles against the Tories into a general movement to bring the Tories down is daily receiving increased support. Indicative of the feeling is the decision of the Central Executive of the Co-operative Union to approach the National Council of Labour to start a wider campaign on the cost of living and the social and economic policy of the Government with a view to trying to bring the Government down. There can be little doubt that following the new Budget with its penal provisions the pressure for such action and mass campaigning will grow.

In considering the next steps needed in the labour movement to force a new General Election and to defeat the Tories the Communist Party Congress advanced these propositions:



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First, unity in action now for wages, against redundancy and to resist rent increases. The more this takes place the more will it become obvious that agreement of all Left forces on the militant and progressive policy is required.

Second, unless each trade union is first democratically won for such a policy the Labour Party cannot be won for the change in policy required.

Third, what is needed is united mass action of all the forces in the Labour movement to defeat the Tory offensive now.

And fourth, there can be no lasting advance unless the issue of unity in action between the Labour and Communist Parties is squarely faced, and bans and proscriptions against members of the Labour and Communist Parties working together are ended.

The necessity to discuss afresh these bans and proscriptions, the need to fight for their removal is not something which only concerns the Communist Party. It is something of vital concern to the whole movement. The operation of these bans and proscriptions by the official leadership lie at the root of the present crisis in the Labour Party. It is because the original conception of the Labour Party as including the trade unions, the Co-operatives and all sections of socialist opinions is being violated that the present difficulties arise. The very mass strength of the Labour Party, its trade union base, makes doubly necessary the strong socialist heart and political directing force of the movement.

The history of the Labour Party between the wars shows the nature of the problem. From its foundation, the Marxist Communist Party sought affiliation to the Labour Party with this aim in view. Every effort was bitterly rejected by the right-wing leaders. Not only was affiliation rejected but in 1925 and 1928 the trade unions were denied the democratic right to elect Communists as delegates of their unions to Labour Party conferences. The I.L.P. which was affiliated, and the Socialist League which took its place have disappeared from the historical scene.

But the Communist Party has developed as a significant political force based on key sections of the working class with its press, clear socialist policy, class understanding and organisation, its ability for action and campaigning and the authority and leadership which thousands of its members have democratically won in the unions and the workshops as a result of indispensable service to the working class. It has arisen and developed out of the political needs of the British working class in its battles against capitalism and its striving for socialism. That is why the strengthening of the Communist Party, alongside all left developments and movements for unity, is



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vital for further working class advance. Formally denied association with the wider labour movement it is in fact part and parcel of it.

Today the bans and proscriptions have been extended by the official leadership to every active Labour worker and Labour Party struggling for a decisive change in policy. The struggle in the Labour Party and the trade unions for a change in policy goes on and will go on until the policy change is won. No Labour Party worker is satisfied with the position. The successive efforts to change the Labour Party constitution of which the 'Victory for Socialism' conference is the latest expression is indicative of the feeling that the leftward-moving socialist-minded Constituency Parties should have more weight in deciding the destiny of the Party. The fact that Transport House tried to ban this conference is yet another example of how bans and proscriptions originally introduced to penalise Communists are used against all progressive Labour people. The struggle of the progressive trade unions for a change in policy, the various left movements of the Constituency Parties and the need to remove the bans and proscriptions prohibiting the association of Communists and Labour Party workers are different aspects of the same problem.

The Communist Party Congress decided on a two-fold objective—to fight for the removal of all bans and proscriptions and to extend the strength of the Party to 50,000. Both are necessary for the advance of the labour movement. 'The removal of these bans and proscriptions', said Harry Pollitt, 'restoring the historic unity of the movement as envisaged by its founders, would be the greatest single step which could be taken to overcome the crisis in the Labour Party. It would signal the end of Tory political domination in Britain, for the removal of the bans would bring about united action between members of the Communist Party and the Labour Party. It would mean the full restoration of democratic practices, the restoration of full rights for all trade unions to elect the representatives that they wish, not only within their own organisation, but to all other bodies, including local and national Labour Party conferences.' The Communist Party Congress declared its willingness to discuss these or any other problems of unity with any organisation of the labour movement. This is something which concerns the whole working class for it is an issue which is vital for its future.

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# ONE OF THE MAMMOTHS

J. CARTER*

WHEN the modern history of the organised labour and working class movement is recorded, one of the most remarkable things apparent on examination will prove to be the relatively small attention paid by the progressive enlightened sections of the movement, be they militants, left-wing Labour, Communist, or just class-conscious workers, towards the destiny of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers. Has anyone heard its decisions, constitution, propaganda (or its rôle in the struggle toward Socialism) discussed or referred to in any left-wing conference? How much publicity has been given to it in the literature of the left? Clearly a change is necessary in this respect.

One of the best Socialist protagonists in the militant labour movement, R. W. Casasola (President of the Foundry Workers' Union), pointed out in *Labour Monthly* (November, 1954) when drawing the lessons of the Labour Party Conference of that year, the proof of advance of support for real Socialist policy is the size of the votes at conferences since 1952, and he proves his contentions conclusively by his figures; but even more significantly uses these words:

> These figures show how a comparatively small advance of clear-cut Socialist policy in one or two large trade unions would completely change the picture of right-wing domination at the Labour Party Conference.

Well, the NUGMW is often regarded as one of the twin pillars of reaction in the trade union movement, the other being the Transport and General Workers' Union. The power of these two unions and their spokesmen and delegates, from the T.U.C. to the smallest trades council, is a tremendous potential for good or evil.

The Transport and General Workers' Union has forced its way into debate amongst all who are genuinely interested in the workers' ultimate victory over capitalism because of the strike struggles amongst its portworkers and passenger transport workers. But can we say the same of the NUGMW? No large-scale strike has taken place within it. Does this mean the workers within it are happy, contented, and well satisfied with their wages, conditions and general standards resulting from the policy of their leaders? Of course not: and on closer examination of the factual happenings through the districts and localities a more accurate picture emerges. Dissatis-

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faction among the rank and file of the union has been expressed through the delegates to Annual Conference where delegate after delegate has drawn attention to the plight of workers in the nationalised industries, particularly electrical and gas workers and other non-trading services. Wages of workers in the gas, electrical and water services were 17s. below the official average earnings return (Ministry of Labour) for the whole country. It was worse still in the case of municipal workers where the gap was £2 10s. Well might the delegate from Dagenham to the Annual Conference say, 'How do you think our wives feel when they go into the shops of Dagenham and cannot afford to purchase the things which the wives of more prosperous motor-workers can?'

In many industries there has been wide discussion on the problem of overtime and the principles involved. But overtime is no problem in municipal employment—it simply does not exist. There is no means (against principles or no) of augmenting the starvation wages. The result of these low wages is significant. After a few weeks in municipal employment younger men simply get out of it and go to higher paid work, leaving local authorities scraping the bottom of the barrel for labour. The older men have been employed from pre-war times when in so many local authorities there was for the first time a Labour majority, and conditions were better than those obtaining in private industry. Many of them have paid in for years for superannuation and are not far from retirement. Nevertheless these men are the old-time militants who helped to put the Labour leaders into power and still (though below the surface perhaps) retain their old-time fire and class-consciousness.

Thousands of London municipal workers receive no more than £7 19s. 0d. per week. Fully qualified school coach drivers are still absurdly underpaid, while having responsibility for spastics and mentally and physically infirm children to transport. School caretakers doing a 66-hour week, also get little enough; and a constant source of friction within municipal employment is the unequal treatment afforded to women employees in wage awards and concessions generally.

The recent strike of Dagenham Corporation employees points the way forward. As a result of this strike the local Joint Industrial Council was immediately forced to consider a special rate of increase in wages. The grudging attitude of the employing side of the Joint Industrial Councils can be gauged by the fact that of the last four general wage increase demands, three have been Arbitration awards, and the point was reached on May 11, 1955, when



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pressure forced the leaders of the union to refuse to be sidetracked into Arbitration. Even this brief show of firmness was sufficient to panic the employing side of the N.J.I.C. to concede 2¾d. per hour (or almost the whole of the demand for 3d. per hour).

In the Essex area it is estimated that the local authority services are two-thirds under-manned, and, conscious of these facts, a delegate quipped at Annual Conference that 'labour was so short in the municipalities it looked as if the Mayor would have to discard his chain of office and pick up a broom and start on his own streets'.

In the trade groups of the union there is unrest—particularly among gas workers who have found out what capitalist nationalisation really means for workers within that industry. Partial strikes often occur within these works where stewards are valiantly leading sections of workers in defence of conditions. The problem of the new intake workers as against the established co-partners* has never been satisfactorily tackled by the leadership of the NUGMW. To this day workers in the gas supply industry limp behind those of electrical supply. Minutes of the National Joint Industrial Councils are available to the electrical workers, but not to the workers in the gas industry. Could this be because of the powerful influence of the Electrical Trades Union? If this is so why cannot the NUGMW (a much larger union) achieve this concession for gas workers? A small matter, perhaps, but indicative of things much greater than this.

In the recent wage demands in the electrical supply industry, Barking Power Station workers in NUGMW were as militant and as ready as the craft workers within that plant. Further, they received the utmost support from all general factory and municipal workers in the area. Whence then comes reaction? It springs from the class-co-operation policy practised by its national officials. One uses the union journal to propagate anti-nationalisation ideas and the need for 'new thinking'. The right of the workers in the shops to go into action to defend themselves is rejected. The educational apparatus of week-end and week training courses has a bias toward 'harmony with the bosses'. It is no accident that in a national situation in which millions of tenants are under attack that room can be found in the union journal to reprint an article by a Kensington Labour Councillor making out the case for differential rents, and right-wing Labour is conscripting all Labour groups on local authorities to operate these differential rent schemes.

*Many of the gas companies before nationalisation had co-partnership schemes. These schemes were wound up in 1951 under Regulations, but by agreement workers who had been in the old schemes continued to receive the same bonus as before.



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In spite of bans and proscriptions operating within the union, hampering inner democracy, a struggle goes on. At the 1954 Congress the platform had a difficult time with the delegates from London and the industrial Midlands who put up a strenuous fight against support for German rearmament. At later stages and subsequent conferences the platform was beaten on many issues, notably on cut-the-call-up and tied cottages motions.

There can be no great advance for the workers within the trades covered by the NUGMW unless there is a cohesive policy of wage increase, correct militant leadership and close connection between the areas and trade groupings. It is wrong to look upon the NUGMW as a lost cause, closed shop for reaction. The workers inside this union do not live in a vacuum and will respond to a lead when given. Is there not a responsibility upon the organised working class movement (progressive craft unions) who have had valuable recent experiences of wage struggles to give the utmost assistance to this union and its members? Might they not help to transform its present character, casting it in a mould nearer the purpose for which Will Thorne helped to create it? So there could be brought to fruition the feat the 'Old 'uns' (Tom Mann, Ben Tillett and others) began—the 'impossible' organisation of the unskilled workers.

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# HISTORICAL MATERIALISM AND THE ANCIENT WORLD

JOSEPH NEEDHAM

PROFESSOR THOMSON is very well known for the brilliant studies in which he has applied the ideas of historical materialism to the thought and economic development of the ancient Mediterranean peoples. In his famous work *Aeschylus and Athens*, for example, he showed how Greek tragedy retained important elements of the primitive collectivism of the Greek people. He has now given us a most stimulating work,* in which he seeks to elucidate the development of ancient Greek philosophy by the study of the social and economic background of the society in which the philosophers and early natural scientists lived. Viewing their work against the background of the emergence of a mercantile middle-class and a money economy, after the first invention of the coinage in the 7th century B.C., he is able to illuminate a vast field of different subjects. With great eloquence, he discusses such questions as the relations of Greek thought to the previous achievements of the Egyptians and Babylonians, the relations of the calendar to its origins in those other civilisations, the beginnings of natural philosophy in the Ionian and Milesian schools, the basis of the democratic revolution in the Greek city states, the relation of Pythagorean number-theory to materialism and idealism, and the like. Because of the freshness of his approach, unconventional as it is for traditional Western classical studies, his book will be a great stimulus to many readers, whether they are themselves engaged in academic work or not.

For the present reviewer, who does not feel competent to offer any criticisms upon the Greek questions involved, one of the greatest merits of Professor Thomson's new book is the determination which he shows to get away from the myth of the unique superiority of the Greeks. This is connected with the name of scholars like Burnet, who believed that the Greeks were the only ancient people who were born observers, the only people who could give rational explanations of the appearances which they observed, and indeed, that neither science nor philosophy ever existed, except among peoples who came under the influence of Greece. Professor Thomson, although

*Studies in Ancient Greek Society*, Volume 2: *The First Philosophers*, by George Thomson. Lawrence & Wishart. London, 1955. 367 pp. 27s. 6d.



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himself trained in Western classical studies, is entirely clear that the achievements of ancient Chinese and also of ancient Indian thought, must be placed upon an equality with those of the ancient Greeks. For example, he draws an interesting comparison between Pythagoras and Confucius, both of whom express the outlook of a new middle-class, intermediate between the nobility and the peasantry, which had arisen through the emergence of commodity production within primitive agrarian economy. He draws attention to many striking parallels between ancient Chinese and Greek philosophical thought. For example, the idea that the five elements conquer one another. This reminds him of the statement of Heraclitus that fire lives the death of air, and air lives the death of fire, and so on. He alludes to the similarity, and even contemporaneity, between the Eleatic paradoxes, and the paradoxes of Hui Shih and the Mohist school in China.

The present reviewer believes that when Chinese thought is more clearly understood, Professor Thomson's insight in detecting these parallels will be abundantly justified. For example, on page 132, he discusses the parallel and antithetical style in Greek writing, and its relation to the hieratic origins of Greek rhetoric. But we find a similar style in ancient Chinese writing, where it is known as the double-harness style. Again (page 147), the Babylonians and Greeks had legends about an unsuccessful father being overthrown by a successful son, and exactly the same thing is present in Chinese legend, where Kun was unable to control the waters to harness the rivers and lakes for irrigation purposes, but his son Yü succeeded. On page 157, Professor Thomson quotes from Diodorus Siculus an account of a kind of centrifugal cosmology, which reads almost as if it were a direct quotation from one of the Chinese Taoist classics, such as *Lieh Tzu* or *Chuang Tzu*. Furthermore (page 229) the idea existed in Greece that a criminal offender was liable to infect all who came in contact with him, and to disturb the functioning of the natural order. This is an extremely Chinese idea, and may be found stated in so many words in ancient Chinese writings. On the following page, the statement of Solon that if a city falls on evil days, the fault lies with the citizens themselves, and not with the will of the gods; this kind of statement is exactly what we find in writers such as Wang Ch'ung. Even more extraordinary, on page 256, Professor Thomson points out that the Greeks derived much stimulus from close and continuous contact with more backward peoples, who had preserved their tribal institutions. We find exactly the same phenomenon in China, where the Taoists consciously pointed



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to the environing tribal peoples as examples of collectivist societies, which they held to be the ideal, because they had not degenerated by the formation of a class society of kings, princes, priests, warriors, and the like.

All those who believe in taking a really oecumenical view of world culture will be very grateful to Professor Thomson for emphasising the parallels between Greek and Chinese thought. However, in some cases he may have gone a little astray, and perhaps it would be interesting to take up a few of these instances for discussion. For example, on page 61 he says that in the Far East there was no civilisation older than the Chinese, which as far as we know was not indebted for its fundamental features to any external source. The reviewer does not feel happy about this point of view, because there are many indications that, in fact, the most ancient Chinese civilisation received much culture from the Fertile Crescent by some overland route. Babylonian elements can be detected in Chinese astronomy, astrology and mathematics, while such fundamental inventions as bronze-metallurgy, the wheel and the plough, must have reached China from some more central points in the Old World. Nor does the reviewer believe that it is right to say that in China large scale irrigation dates only from the Han dynasty. There were already in much earlier times, as far back as the 6th century B.C., important dams for irrigation water, and a beginning of measures for the control of the great rivers. Nor can it be right to suggest that large-scale hydraulic control never became so important as in Egypt and Mesopotamia. On the contrary, it was surely almost the principal factor in moulding Chinese society. On page 78, Professor Thomson accepts a formulation of Caudwell, according to which China shared with Egypt and Babylonia the conception of the God-King. This, again, cannot be substantiated, for if one thing was more clear about the Son of Heaven than any other, throughout the ages, it was that he was always a man and not a god. One cannot understand why, on page 163, the principle of opposites, the Yin-Yang in Chinese thought, is said to involve only a dynastic, and not a cosmic, cycle. In fact, the conception of the Yin and Yang embodied almost from the beginning, a kind of wave-like succession of dominance of one or other of the two principles. Moreover, at least as soon as the entry of Buddhist thought from India, there was familiar in China the idea of periodical world conflagrations, in which everything was destroyed, and after which a new evolutionary development began all over again. Perhaps the most serious misunderstanding occurs on page 262, in which we read that of the



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opposites in China, the Yin and Yang, one member was always more or less superior to the other. This reviewer would maintain that one of the most characteristic features of the Chinese theory of cosmic opposites, was that perfection consisted in their balance, neither one nor the other dominating, or else only dominating at the proper time for it to dominate. The idea of one as essentially or morally superior to the other, seems to be a dualism Persian rather than Chinese.

Perhaps Professor Thomson sometimes dismisses certain ideas as elements from the primitive world of mythology a little too easily. For instance, on page 309 he says that the opposed forces of Love and Strife, of attraction and repulsion, which was central in the thought of Empedocles, were really only figures from a mythological world. But one feels a little uneasy about this, in view of the fact that in the most modern scientific conceptions, attraction and repulsion as we see it among the elementary particles of which all matter is composed, and in all electrical phenomena, still seem to be something very fundamental in the universe. One also feels that Professor Thomson is sometimes a little too prone to attribute too much to certain favourite authors. For example, Caudwell can hardly have been the first to draw attention to the important truth, that the rise of modern atomic theory was more or less contemporaneous with the rise of bourgeois society. He quotes a passage from him of 1938 in proof of this; but already three years before, in a section entitled 'The Rise of Mechanistic Economics', contained in the collective book 'Christianity and the Social Revolution', there had been a clear statement that at the beginnings of bourgeois society, men were to be thought of as selfish monads or corpuscles, like the atoms of natural science, with the price-mechanism taking the place of the Newtonian laws of motion. The writer there quoted the words of Gervase Malynes in his *Lex Mercatoria* of 1622, who wrote:

> Thus we see how one thing driveth or enforceth another, like as in a clock where there are many wheels. The first wheel being stirred driveth the next, and that the third, and so forth, till the last that moveth the instrument striketh the clock; or like as in a press going in a strait, where the foremost is driven by him that is next to him, and the next by him that followeth him.

And later on it was pointed out that the unrestricted competitiveness of the new capitalism had something very obviously atomistic about it. Indeed, one can hardly believe that this idea was new in 1935. Surely it must go back to Weber, or other writers a good deal earlier.

One particularly interesting feature of Professor Thomson's new book is the relations which he traces between the ancient pagan



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world, and the rise of Christianity. He also brings out in many places significant parallels between Greek and Jewish thought. It is extremely interesting to find him quoting some Christian poetry (translated from Byzantine Greek), to show how the primitive dialectics could not be effaced, even by the taking over of Greek philosophy and rhetoric by the ruling class of the late Hellenistic world, and in which one can see how the liturgical writers pour scorn on the philosophers, who are incapable of grasping such simple and self-evident truths as the unity of opposites. All in all, Professor Thomson's book is a mine of interesting ideas and stimulating thoughts in which everyone should go and dig. He will surely long be remembered as the first of the European classicists to shake off the fetters of the Europocentrism which has bound them till now, and to recognise in all humility the equality of the contributions of the ancient Chinese and Indian peoples.

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**Book Review**

## GEORGE HARDY'S STORY

*Those Stormy Years*, by George Hardy. (256 pp. Lawrence & Wishart, *15s.*)

PICTURE to yourself a young lad, son of a farm labourer, turned plater's helper, dock worker and soldier by turns, packing what trifling possessions he has and going off, with a group of emigrants, to open up for himself a new life in Canada. Among his meagre possessions there was a trade union card. This, with a healthy body, a will to work and an even stronger will to see that he got properly paid for whatever work came his way, provided the ingredients for the story of the amazing range of activities and the amazing area of the earth these activities covered in the life of George Hardy. Jobs in Toronto and its vicinity. The reasons for leaving them or losing them, leading to victimisation. Then off across the country to Edmonton and after a job or two there, further on to the farthest west, Victoria on Vancouver Island. During this time a political awakening. In Victoria he met some socialist friends and got an introduction to Karl Marx and other well-known writers. As he says on page 28:

> A little later I went to hear E. T. Kingsley of Vancouver lecture on economics. That was a real eye-opener. I believe my political education began in that period.

A sign of educational advance is given on the next page:

> There was a good tradition of trade unionism in Victoria and in my own trade no union at all, and I decided to tackle the job of organising the teamsters. My early agitational efforts with their 'bull at the gate' methods now seem to me to have been wrong. I would try tact.

From then on it was a continual case of agitation and organisation. Successful strikes and strikes that ended in defeat, but always advancing in knowledge and experience. The Teamsters' Union belonged to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters which was affiliated to the American Federation of Labour. The A.F. of L. was in general made up of strictly craft unions and it took



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no interest in, or showed the least concern for, the many millions of unorganised workers outside their own particular crafts. It was in this situation that the Industrial Workers of the World appeared, attacking the pro-capitalist outlook of the A.F. of L. leaders and seeking to organise the un-organised masses on the basis of a strong militant policy aimed at the complete overthrow of capitalist power. But this great task was to be accomplished by industrial action alone. Politics were anathema to the I.W.W. and politicians, without distinction, fakers and frauds. Because of the reactionary character of the international leaders of the Teamsters' Brotherhood, the Teamsters of Victoria broke away and joined up with the I.W.W. This not only severed their connection with the A.F. of L., but it also disassociated them from the trade union movement of British Columbia. 'A serious mistake' says Hardy (page 38).

But there he was, still in his middle twenties, married and with his first boy, the organiser and leader of a trade union, battling through strikes, lockouts and continual studying to get an understanding of Marxism and all that it would mean for an advance of the working class. I cannot in a short review follow him on his trip to Australia where he found what an inspiring influence Tom Mann had had upon the working class movement; or to New Zealand and from there back to Canada; all the time agitating and organising. With the coming of the first world war the fight became ever more intense. Then in the autumn of 1917, while he was up in Alaska, he read in an evening paper 'Haywood Arrested — All I.W.W. Offices Raided by Federal Officers'. Big Bill Haywood was the fighting leader of the I.W.W. and he and all other leaders were in jail. George Hardy returned to Chicago to take over and was soon in jail along with them. It is not possible here to give anything like an idea of the corruption, the brutality and the murderous character of the American bosses and the use they made of armed thugs and the law courts to suppress the active leaders of the working class. It is a terrible revelation, even to those who have been reading something about McCarthyism.

After his release from imprisonment and the end of the war, there came the bitter struggle for the formation of a Communist Party. Inspired by the great October Revolution George Hardy took his stand with the Communists and was soon in conflict with the reactionary so-called 'unpolitical' leaders of the I.W.W. who were among the most vicious enemies of the young Soviet Union. After the break from this organisation and his work in helping to get the Party started in America he returned to Britain and played a very big part, with Harry Pollitt, in the Minority Movement. Then over to Moscow, and from Moscow to Berlin where under semi-illegal conditions he carried on work at the Bureau of the Red International. While there he was pressed to go to China to participate in the work of the Advisory Bureau there. Three years he spent, three years of the most appalling terror carried out by Chiang Kai-shek as agent of American imperialism. The Canton Rising—suppressed in a sea of blood. The executioner's sword rising and falling with incessant regularity. What a ghastly story. How the unfortunate masses of China were beaten down into what appeared helpless passivity. But all the time, cool courageous leadership on the part of the



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Chinese Communists, with all of whom Hardy and a few others were closely associated, made it possible for the author to write that in April, 1951:

> I had the supreme happiness of witnessing one of the greatest of all these moments when at the age of 67 I visited China in the early months of the Liberation.

What a joyful experience that was, in contrast to the terror that he saw 22 years earlier. Later on he visited South Africa to help the comrades there. To all parts of the world he has gone. Always with the workers in their struggles against the oppressors. Always with the colonial peoples in their fight for liberation. Strikes, lockouts, massacres. All this has been part of the growth of the working class movement in the various lands, and George Hardy has been associated with that growth and has grown politically himself in the process.

After all these stormy years he was with me in 1935 in a quiet backwater in Fife, the mining village of Kelty, where he and a few other comrades did a remarkable job in bringing about the election of the first Communist M.P. This is a book that abounds with lessons for those who desire to play a part in the working class movement. Follow George Hardy in his world-wide travels, in his world-wide experience of working class struggle and of revolution, and you will be richer, politically richer, for your study.

WILLIAM GALLACHER

## TRADE UNIONS AND DEMOCRACY

*Bryn Roberts and the National Union of Public Employees*, by W. W. Craik. (230 pp. Allen & Unwin. *16s.*)

IN 21 years the National Union of Public Employees under the leadership of Bryn Roberts has grown from a membership of 13,000 to 190,000. Against the most bitter opposition it has organised the worst paid workers in local government and has played a major part in securing negotiating machinery in the service. One might have expected this book to be a record of trade union struggle against reactionary local authorities, instead it is a story of bitter resistance to N.U.P.E.'s efforts by the two great general workers' unions, often in alliance with the T.U.C. and Labour Ministers. Personally, without minimising Mr. Robert's work, I found Mr. Craik's admiration for his hero rather tiring, and I think his book would have been stronger if he had paid more attention to the struggle and a little less to Mr. Roberts. Nevertheless the facts are carefully documented and they are devastating.

N.U.P.E. campaigned for year after year for a national wages machinery for various grades of municipal employees. The leaders of the Transport and General Workers' Union and the General and Municipal Workers' Union opposed the policy. They accused Bryn Roberts of 'introducing red herrings' when he brought a resolution before the T.U.C. in 1938. When, eventually, N.U.P.E. won its demand, the two general workers' unions ganged up to take for themselves all the trade union seats on the national and regional councils. N.U.P.E. fought against the practice of paying workers' wages by cheque. The union's view that the practice was illegal was confirmed by the highest legal opinion and a mass of evidence was produced to prove the hardship involved. The two general workers' unions refused to back the campaign and Mr. Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary in the coalition, issued an order legalising the practice. After



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the war, and only after a further campaign, the union won.

Through all these years, Bryn Roberts, despite his obvious ability, was kept off the T.U.C. General Council, and Mr. Craik quotes evidence to show that he had toed the line he could have gone far in the trade union hierarchy. Of course he could. The block votes of the two general workers' unions plus the others they have so far always been able to receive enable their leaders to ensure a permanent right wing majority on the T.U.C. For certain groups they place unchallenged nominees. In the group to which the smaller unions like N.U.P.E. nominate, they back safe men. If their safe man dares to step on the wrong side of the line, he is out at the next Congress and he knows it. If he never goes astray politically, he will be given all the opportunities in the world. Even if a powerful union like the miners nominates an Arthur Horner, a nominee will be brought in from some small union and elevated to the General Council overnight.

In the Labour Party Executive, the trade union group and the women's group are selected by the same block votes. Mr. Gaitskell is elected Treasurer though he cannot secure a seat on the Executive from the constituency parties who represent the active workers in the movement.

Are Mr. Bryn Robert's members a different sort of people from the workers in the general workers' union? Do busmen in the T. & G.W.U. think differently from railwaymen in the N.U.R.? Of course not; their class interests are the same. The answer therefore must lie in the way democracy works or fails to work in the unions. It lies in the rule book and the branch meetings, the method of electing or appointing officials in the unions and the extent to which the authority to wield vast block votes is controlled by the members. If this book stimulates serious thinking on these questions in the trade union and Labour movement, it will render a great service. But the solution will not be found in Mr. Craik's method of portraying Mr. Roberts as a 20th century David battling alone against Goliath. The branches of the Woodworkers' Union who fought back against leaders who voted for German rearmament in defiance of the mandate of their conference; the A.E.U. National Committee which is insisting on its right to control the use of the block vote; busmen, dockers, market porters in the Transport Workers Union who are demanding militant action; these are some examples of the forces which in the end will defeat the stranglehold on militant action which Mr. Bryn Roberts so rightly condemns.

GORDON SCHAFFER

## CHINESE CREATIVENESS

*Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. IV (1941-45).* (348 pp. Lawrence & Wishart. *6s.*)

I CONTINUE enthusiastically to direct the attention of comrades to the writings of Comrade Mao. Am I right to do so? China is not Europe, and Mao himself has forceful criticism of Chinese comrades whose theory, derived from foreign sources, is not sufficiently transformed by application to the Chinese scene. He contrasts their painstaking gleanings of knowledge of countries with their comprehensive ignorance of the economic, political, military and cultural history of China during the last hundred years. Does this mean that we should take our eyes off China and confine our attention to our own affairs? Well, of course it would be



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wrong if comrades lost themselves in the details of Chinese land-reform and remained ignorant of the position on the trade union front at home. Nevertheless I again press upon comrades the advantages and enjoyment to be derived from the perusal of these volumes, which, incidentally, are so splendidly translated, edited and produced.

Let me stress three features of the present volume which have specially appealed to me. First there is the confidence one feels at seeing Marxism so freshly and so brilliantly applied. It is not that Mao acknowledges no masters. On the contrary, the apt reference to Marx or Engels, to Lenin or Stalin, is part of the mastery displayed. But still more instructive, still more exciting, is it to see everything re-made by its complete fusion with the actuality of the Chinese scene. Mao's writings are a perpetual lesson in creative Marxism. Then he makes us feel that we might be creative too, for his own strength seems to be drawn from contact with ordinary people. Wishing to understand a particular locality he personally consults cadres of middle and lower rank, a student who had passed the first stage of the old imperial examination and was at a low ebb financially, an insolvent ex-president of the chamber of commerce, a revenue clerk, a petty jailer 'who first gave me a complete picture of the rottenness of the Chinese jails. All these people were my respected and beloved teachers and, in order to learn from them as a pupil, I, as was only proper, was respectful and industrious and adopted a comradely attitude towards them, for otherwise they would have paid no heed to me and would have told me nothing they knew, or at least not everything'.

There is a humility here, evident in many other passages and just below the surface everywhere, from which spring splendid fruits. One of these fruits I discussed at some length in noticing an earlier volume. It is Mao's perception in the insurgent peasantry of a social creativeness, now proved historically but then invisible to less clear eyes. Here again is this sense of the heroism of the people and of the richness of their lives, which Mao sees as the source of all culture. The freshness of his conviction on this point gives a rare quality to his summing up of the discussion on art and literature at the Yenan Forum in 1942.

Perhaps I might illustrate this point by an experience of my own. I once entered a coach on a Welsh train where four steel-workers with their heads together were discussing bravery. 'There was Dai', said one of them, 'with the mould in the tongs and the hot metal pouring into it. If he dropped it we were all for it. Well, there came a leak in the joint over his head and the molten metal began to dribble on his back. But he hung on till we all got out.' The simplicity of the speech and the matter-of-fact earnestness of the faces were part of the scene, which came back to me as I read Mao's many references to the heroism and creativeness of ordinary people. One source of his leadership is his ability to harness these powers to constructive and co-operative ends. Everybody sees that what is happening in China is affecting the destiny of the human race. But what is happening in China? I recommend Mao's books as uniquely helpful guides.

BENJAMIN FARRINGTON



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## Shorter Notices

*Against the Law*, by Peter Wildeblood. (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, *16s.*)

THIS book is written by a homosexual who was convicted in a somewhat sensational trial and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment, which he served — subject to the usual remission — in Winchester and Wormwood Scrubs Prisons. In an extremely well-written book, he tells us objectively and quietly—and with much dignity —what it means to be a homosexual; and the book constitutes a strong plea for the amendment of the law. Equally well does he tell us of the waste and futility of prison life; and the book constitutes a strong plea for the alteration of the prison system. He tells us a great deal, too, of police methods, and something of the legal profession. The book must be read by everyone with a social conscience; it is thus good that it is so readable. It makes one wish for the realisation of the reforms demanded by the writer, who faces his problems so directly and refrains so carefully from any expressions of sentimentality or self-pity. D. N. PRITT

*Christianity & Communism.* Study Papers Nos. 1-7. (40 pp. Society of Friends. *1s. 9d.*)

THESE papers represent the findings of a study group of the Society of Friends which is concerned with East-West relations, and they are on an altogether higher level than the great bulk of literature on the question of Christianity and Communism. They begin by recognising the idealism that there is in Communism and the significance of its claim to stand for a new order of justice and equality and by recording the strength of the appeal of communism to the deprived, the homeless and the oppressed. They go on to talk of the positive achievements of the Soviet Union and of China. From such a beginning only good can come and there is much good in the pages that follow. Nevertheless strange misconceptions remain and the Group was right to publish the papers as 'an aid to further study' and 'not as representing a final or formal judgement'. STANLEY EVANS

*What Are These Soviet Trade Unions?* (24 pp. British-Soviet Friendship Society. *6d.*)

THE considerable extension of exchanges of delegations between British unions and those of the U.S.S.R. has been giving rise to a very lively interest in the functions and aims of the trade unions in the Soviet Union. In the past, too many articles and documents on the Soviet trade unions have dealt with aspects of their work which are not those which interest workers in capitalist countries. The strength of this booklet lies, not only in the clarity and simplicity with which the issues are presented, but in the fact that the series of questions answered are the principal queries raised by British trade union branches and trade unionists. The booklet also substantiates the remark in the report published in March by the International Labour Office that the Soviet trade unions 'are quite in a position to look after their interests and that it is not likely that they are subject to domination and control by the government'.

T. McW.

*A letter from the publisher and the editor of 'Peter the First' (reviewed in April) will appear in our June issue.*

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I think. It gives a Marxist analysis. Each number is *useful*, written for active people—no abstract theory nor dogma here. We draw on the best traditions of the British Labour movement, and constantly bring to light experiences from the past—reprinting William Morris, unpublished letters by Marx and Engels, and so on. And what a rich storehouse Britain's past provides! All articles are written for the sole purpose of promoting labour unity, in the comradely spirit of international brotherhood. Finally — no small matter, this — we have thirty five uninterrupted years of experience in doing the job.

There it is, and we rely on readers to make fullest use of it in winning more for the path of progress. Some fine circulation-building efforts are in hand—including some scientific planning by a group of shop stewards in one of the huge motor factories of the Big Five. Other readers whose personal scope is less vast methodically study each number, pick out special articles most likely to appeal and get after friends at work, in their trade union or trades council, tenants' association and the like. The Specimen Copy Scheme (see back cover) is always at your disposal. In the March number I had timidly to mention how steeply our costs are rising. When postal charges went up by two-thirds, we were forced to send subscribers' copies out in a thin wrapper. (Some wrote that they would gladly pay the cost to have it still sent by envelope, and we are making special arrangements where this is vital). Since then new G.P.O. rates have been announced— and I write this before the Budget. Letters from some who at once sent gifts would move a heart of stone, if not of a Tory Chancellor. When I see that the majority were actually from retired people on pension, I find it impossible to comment. Let me just quote the reader who says his contribution is 'a drop in the ocean of goodwill that I have for L.M.' March donations totalled:

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